

# Sant'Agnese in Agone

## St Agnes at the Circus Agonalis

*Piazza Navona*



**Sant'Agnese in Agone** (also called **Sant'Agnese in Piazza Navona**) is a 17th-century Baroque church in Rome, Italy. It faces onto the Piazza Navona, one of the main urban spaces in the historic center of the city and the site where the Early Christian Saint [Agnes](#) was martyred in the ancient Stadium of Domitian. [1]

According to legend St. Agnes was a beautiful young girl who was born in the late third century shortly before Rome converted to Christianity. When she was about thirteen years old, she renounced marriage in favor of Christ, and her frustrated suitors betrayed her Christianity to the authorities. She was consigned to a brothel, but when she was stripped of her clothes, her nakedness was hidden from view by the sudden and spontaneous growth of her hair. Continuing to resist the threats of her persecutors, she was condemned to be burned at the stake, but the flames refused to touch her. Ultimately she was beheaded (305 AD), and was buried on the Via Nomentana, where one of Rome's oldest churches (dating from around 350 C.E. and still intact) was built on the site of her martyrdom in her honor. [7] [c] [e]

### History

#### Piazza Navona

Piazza Navona is a very interesting example of the evolution of the fabric and the urban space. From its creation as a Roman stadium, to a medieval market, to culminate as a superb baroque square, Piazza Navona has never lost its playful character and its power to attract people. It is not only one of the most beautiful and famous piazzas in Italy, as part of the historic center of Rome it is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. [9]

The Circus of Domitian, also known as the Circus Agonalis (an arena for Greek style athletic competition, built by Emperor Domitian), erected in 85 AD, was an elongated horseshoe-shaped structure, 276 x 54 m. In the central area it was free for the athletes' games, and since it was a stadium and not a circus, it had no dividing wall or spina in the middle of the space. Bleachers with a capacity for 30,000 spectators were located around it. [e]

The stadium continued to be used for staging games up to the beginning of the 5th century. The name Navona derives from *agone*, which in Latin means "games". After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the stadium stands began to be occupied by families as well as small sanctuaries dedicated to Saint Agnes and St. Catherine. [e]

Later the Pamfili (or Panphilj) family built their palace next to the sanctuary. This space at the middle of the stadium began to be used as a market during the Middle Ages, and eventually they played informal games here.

Between 1652 and 1866 Piazza Navona also acquired a unique tradition: the floor of the square was flooded during the weekends of each August (blocking for this the drainage of the sources) and turned into a lake in honor of the Pamfili family, although it is false that there were executed here representations of naval battles. [9]

### Church

An oratory was built here, probably in the 8th century when it was mentioned in the Itinerary of Einsiedeln, and dedicated to St Agnes. It stood on the spot where she was martyred, in 304 A.D., over a brothel in the arcades of circus. It was served by Basilian monks of the Byzantine rite. According to an inscription the oratory was enlarged and transformed into a small basilica by Pope Calixtus II, and consecrated on 28 January 1123. [1] [e]

In 1186 the church was listed as dependent on San Lorenzo in Damaso, and the Catalogue of Turin, c. 1320, states that it had one priest. It would have been fully parochial by this time. In 1597, the Benedictines of Farfa gave up the patronage of the church, and it was transferred to the Minor Clerks Regular known as Caracciolini. They executed a major restoration. [1] [3]

By this time, the Piazza Navona contained several *palazzj* of high-status families, and it is on record that they used the church as a location for their sepulchral monuments. [1]

In the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century part of the Pamphilj (or Pamphili) family, who moved to Rome from Gubbio, bought a small house on the via dell'Anima which was later merged with some neighboring buildings in order to build a palace. They executed a successful takeover of the church and turned it into their private possession. In 1644 a member of the family was elected pope, taking the name of Innocent X. Early in his reign, the family built a palazzo next to the church which was designed by **Girolamo Rainaldi** and his son **Carlo**. Then the pope had the idea of rebuilding the church as the mortuary chapel of the palazzo. [1] [4] [8] [a]

The rebuilding began in 1652, with the demolition of the old church except for the ancient Roman remains in the crypt. The first proposed design was by **Girolamo Rainaldi** (who was still working on the unfinished palazzo next door), and his son **Carlo Rainaldi**. They proposed a church on the plan of a Greek cross, with a drumless dome, rectilinear façade and a substantial flight of stairs leading to the front door on the Piazza Navona. However, the design was publicly criticized and the pope was not happy with it, so he gave the commission to **Francesco Borromini** in 1653. [1] [3] [a]

At this time the Caracciolini Fathers abandon the church of Sant'Agnese in *agone*, near the demolition, and moved to San lorenzo in Lucina. [3]

**Borromini** redesigned the façade, but had to maintain the interior essentially the way the **Rainaldis** had developed, with some changes. Innocent X died in 1655, and work proceeded slowly under the oversight of his nephew Camillo Pamphilj. The new pope, Alexander VII, was no friend of **Borromini** and appointed a committee to enquire into any fraud or mismanagement on his part. **Borromini** resigned in 1657 before he could be dismissed, and **Carlo Rainaldi** took over again. Sadly, **Borromini's** imaginative design for the proposed pair of campanili was discarded in favor of

something more conventional. More seriously, progress slowed right down. [1] [3]

Camillo died in 1666 before the church was finished, and his wife Olimpia Aldobrandini decided to call in **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**. He altered **Borromini's** design, leaving the the façade mainly as planned but adding a high pediment surmounted by an attic. The edifice was completed in 1672, and the church was consecrated on 17 January of that year despite having decorative features uncompleted. Also, the entrance flight of stairs was only finished in the following year by **Giuseppe Baratta**, while **Giovanni Maria Baratta** completed the bell towers. [1] [3] [5]

The original main altar was replaced by the present one in 1724. Unusually for a church, this altar is not dedicated to the patron but to St John the Baptist. Amazingly, the church remained in the private possession of the Pamphilj family for over three hundred years. However, they let it get into a serious state of disrepair in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. To their credit, they then spent a very large sum of money in a thorough restoration by **Andrea Busiri Vici**, and this took place between 1852 and 1859. Also, they commissioned **Giovanni Battista Celsi** to provide a set of wrought iron railings in 1851 to stop the rabble sitting on the entrance steps. [1] [3]

The family finally donated the church to the Diocese of Rome in 1992. Since then it has had no major pastoral function, but is one of the most popular churches for tourists to visit in Rome. [1]

## **The Fountain of the Four Rivers**

The central element of the piazza is the masterpiece of the brilliant architect and sculptor **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**: The Fountain of the Four Rivers, brilliantly sculpted between 1648-51. Four marble figures, arranged in dramatic tension, represent rivers in each of the four continents known at the time:

- the Nile (whose dark face represents the unknown origins of this river);
- the Danube (facing the emblems of Innocent X),
- the Ganges (holding an oar for its length as a navigable river) and
- the Río de la Plata (redefined coins to symbolize the wealth of America).

This obelisk is not of ancient Egyptian origin, but was created at Aswan (Upper Egypt, 640 km south of Cairo) by the order of Roman Emperor Domitianus in 1st Century, and brought to Rome by Emperor Caracalla. It later fell and broke into several pieces. The pieces of obelisk were assembled, and the dove [a symbol of the Pope's family, Pamphilj], instead of a Christian cross, was put at the apex, and then the obelisk topped the Fountain. A few fragments were missing and had to be replaced; they were later found and are now in the Egyptian Museum in the Vatican. [9]

Many guides in Rome will explain how Bernini made one of the personifications in his Fountain of the Four Rivers hold his hand as if protecting himself from the imminent collapse of the façade. It is true that the relationship between Borromini and Bernini was tense (although they did work together at one time), but the fountain was completed before the façade so the apparent gesture was not intentional. [1]

## **Plan**

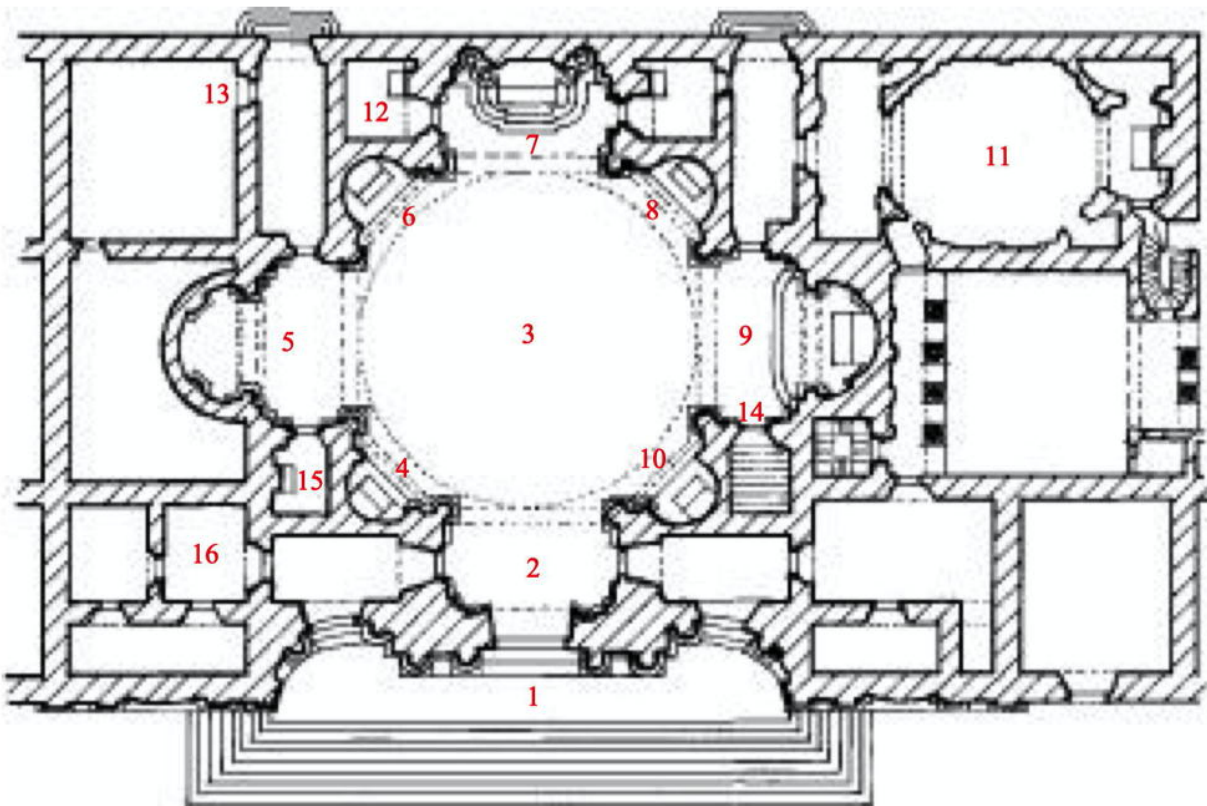
The plan is quite complex, and involves an octagon superimposed on a Greek cross itself superimposed on a square. The sides of the square line up with the inner corners of the campanili, which are part of the unified design of the façade which is tacked onto the near arm of the Greek cross. This arm forms the entrance vestibule, which leads into the domed nave which is an irregular octagon formed by chamfering a square smaller than the one just mentioned. The side arms of the Greek cross are the chapels dedicated to St Agnes (right) and St Sebastian (left), and the far arm is the apse containing the main altar. [1]

The outline of the larger square is maintained by four enormous piers which support the dome, and into each pier is inserted a small apsidal chapel which open off the shorter sides of the octagon. [1]

The stairs down to the crypt are in the right side of the chapel of St Agnes. To the left of the chapel of St Sebastian is the chapel of St Francesca Romana, and to the right of the same is the chapel of St Philip Neri. The left hand side of the chapel of St Agnes has a door which leads through two

rooms to the main sacristy designed by Borromini. [1]

Via di Santa Maria dell'Anima



Piazza Navona

## Exterior

### Façade (7)

The wide, partly coved (concave) façade is the work of Rainaldi (although most of it was planned by Borromini), who worked on it from 1657 to 1672. It was very influential on later Baroque architecture in Europe. [1]

There are three separate but unified design elements: The central coved frontage (which is the actual façade of the church), and the pair of identical campanili which front side rooms. All elements are of the same white travertine limestone. [1]

Starting with the central zone, which is of one storey although there is a high attic. The focus is on a entrance with two pairs of Corinthian semi-columns supporting an entablature with a molded architrave, a blank frieze and a cornice with modillions. The capitals of the semi-columns are connected by swags. Above the entablature is a triangular pediment intruding into the attic, which has a blank tympanum. On the apex of the pediment is the coat-of-arms of Pope Innocent X, which reaches above the balustrade of the attic. [1]

The very large central doorway has bronze doors sporting the Pamphilj dove, and a Baroque doorcase crowned by a winged putto's head beneath a segmental pediment set on a pair of inverted wineglass plinths. [1]

The two coved zones either side of the propylaeum contain the smaller side doors, and it through one of these that visitors usually enter the church. They are crowned by vertical elliptical tondi sheltered by omega-shaped cornices, and each is bounded by a pair of semi-columns in the same

style as those of the propylaeum. Above these doorways is a pair of blank, almost square tablets in relief with molded borders. [1]

The attic has a balustrade with balusters except behind the main coat-of-arms, where it is solid. [1]

The rear of the church, on Via di Santa Maria dell'Anima, has a travertine façade containing a pedimented aedicule with an image of Our Lady. The interesting thing here is the pair of bricked-up doors with raised segmental pediments, descendants of the original entrances to the mediaeval church. The façade has two storeys, the first one having four Corinthian pilasters in shallow relief and the second having a very large archivolt enclosing a lunette window which lights the church from above the main altar. [1]

To the north of this façade is a doorway which leads into a room which, in turn, leads either to the Chapel of St Agnes or to the Borromini Sacristy. [1]

### Campanili

The two identical campanili have three storeys. The first has two pairs of conjoined Corinthian pilasters supporting an entablature which is a continuation of that of the central frontage. They enclose two large windows, a rectangular one with a triangular pediment and balustraded balcony over a round-headed one. [1]

The second storey has a very high plinth which is a continuation of the central attic, and this supports a square kiosk with two Corinthian pilasters at each corner which support an entablature with a very prominent cornice. The plinth has four blind pilasters embellished with rectangular panels, and the outer two of these end in bases for statues. However, only the inner one of the right-hand campanile has a statue; the others are empty. The kiosk has a large archway with the wall above it bowed, and this bowed wall has a relief of flying angels supporting the coat-of-arms of the Pamphili family. [1]

The third storey of the campanili is round, with four conjoined pairs of Corinthian columns supporting a cog-wheel entablature and framing rectangular apertures with pairs of pilasters. The cupolas are ogee shaped, in lead with finials in the same style as that on the dome lantern. [1]

Note that the plinths of the campanili have two clocks. This was not originally a redundancy for the sake of symmetry. Originally one of them showed the Italian method of telling the time, which is now completely unfamiliar. This divided the duration of daylight into six "hours", the length of which of course changed with the seasons. Zero hour was sunrise, and the sixth hour was fixed at sunset. This meant that the clocks had only six numerals and one hand, and had to be re-set regularly to be correct. Incredibly the Papal government persisted with this method of telling the time well into the 19th century, forcing the city to go back to the old method after the French occupation. The other clock told the time in the familiar way, which used to be called tempo Ultramontano or "the way they tell the time on the other side of the Alps". [1]

### Dome

The octagonal dome, ellipsoidal in lead with double ribs, sits on a high drum with a large rectangular window on each side. Alternate windows are sheltered by floating gables and archivolts. In between the windows are conjoined pairs of Corinthian pilasters supporting a cog-wheel entablature. The lantern is Carlo Rainaldi's design, and involves eight engaged Corinthian columns (Borromini wanted sixteen) with narrow round-headed windows in between. The columns support another cog-wheel entablature, decorated with eight flaming torch finials and with an ogee cupola on top. The whole ensemble is topped off by a cross on a globe. [1]

## **Interior**

The Greek cross plan of Rainaldi was conserved by the later architects, and Borromini added eight large ribbed Corinthian columns of red cottanello marble to flank the arms of the cross. This arrangement emphasizes the octagonal shape of the intersection, and many fail to notice the Greek cross plan. The interior is dominated by the dome, sitting above the octagonal space. [1]

The cross-arms are barrel-vaulted in gilded stucco, and the vault above the main altar is stepped



inwards to focus attention downwards onto the altar. There is a large lunette window above the main altar. [1]

The four smaller side chapels have conchs above the altarpieces, and above these are stucco panels between the capitals of the pairs of pilasters that flank the cottanello columns. These panels contain angels and putti with attributes of the saints to whom the chapels are dedicated. [1]

Inside, the building's split-personality origins are far more visible. On the lower level (up to the cornice), the decoration is limited to carving, reflecting Borromini's preference for pure architecture accented only by sculpture; on the upper level (above the cornice), painting and gilding predominate, reflecting Bernini's propensity to combine all the arts into one grand, comprehensive scheme. [a]

The interior decoration is extremely sumptuous, and very expensive. One immediately noticeable feature is that the altarpieces are not paintings, but relief carvings in marble. 19<sup>th</sup> century guidebooks were often dismissive of the ensemble, and it is true that the church contains no outstanding individual artworks. Its value lies in the survival as a coherent scheme of a major act of patronage of a famous source of artistic benefaction in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. [1]

Each cross arm has a pair of doorways in the side walls, surmounted by cantoria for individual singers which look like floating opera boxes. In between these cantoria and the doorways are eight panels displaying flying angels holding attributes of the patron saint, and these are by **Domenico Guidi** and **Ercole Ferrata**. Going anticlockwise from the right of the entrance, the artists are: Guidi, Ferrata [2], Guidi, Ferrata, Guidi, uncertain. [1] (13)

### Dome (3)

The dome is one of several in Rome on the empyrean model, which attempts to persuade the one looking up that the view is of the heavens opened. The drum has paired ribbed Corinthian pilasters in between eight large windows having segmental pediments with split cornices, all the details being gilded. Blue strips between pilasters and windows emphasize the empyrean effect. The frieze of the entablature at the bottom of the drum has an inscription: *Ingressa Agnes turpitudinis locum, angelum Domini praeparatum invenit* ("On entering the place of uncleanness, Agnes found the angel of the Lord ready"). [1]

The dome fresco depicts *The Apotheosis of St Agnes into the Glory of Heaven*, and is mostly by **Ciro Ferri**. However, he died in 1689 before finishing it and his pupil **Sebastiano Corbellini** completed the fresco. It contains a host of angels, saints and Old Testament characters centered on Our Lady welcoming Agnes. Not all the saints have been positively identified, but the blond holding a cross is obviously St Mary Magdalen and the character with the harp is King David. St Philip Neri is also there, and there is a suspicion that he was added when the fresco was retouched during the 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration. [1] [d]

The lantern contains the *Dove of the Holy Spirit*, which is a rather boastful allusion to the Pamphilj dove as well. [1]

The four large dome pendentives display frescoes showing *Allegories of the four Cardinal Virtues*. They are the first frescoes executed by **Giovanni Battista Gaulli**, nicknamed **Il Baciccio**, who was indebted to Bernini for the commission. *Prudence* and *Providence* are to the left of the main altar, and *Justice* and *Peace* to the right. Facing the entrance, *Fortitude* and *Charity* are to the left (note the violent putto hitting a Classical statue with a hammer), and to the right are *Temperance* and *Chastity*. The latter has a pair of putti having a fight; the winner is *Anteros*, and the blindfolded loser is *Eros*. The figure at the bottom wearing a rosy crown represents *Lust*, and there has been some speculation as to which of the Pamphilj family's female enemies it was modelled on. [1] [3]

### High altar (7)

The main altar is not part of the main decorative cycle of the church since it was only finished in 1724, based on a design by **Carlo Rainaldi**, then executed by **Ciro Ferri** and by **Francesco Moderati**. It replaced an earlier one designed by Mattia de Rossi. Four ribbed Composite columns in verde antico support an entablature with the frieze in the same stone, and above is a split and involuted pediment into which is inserted a device containing a dove in glory. A pair of angels sit on

the halves of the pediment, and above three putti hold a bronze scroll by **G. B. Maini**. The scroll reads: *Non surrexit inter natos mulierum maior Ioanne Battista* ("None has arisen among the sons of women greater than John the Baptist"). The altar is dedicated to him, and there is also a sly reference to *Giovanni Battista Pamphilj*, the former name of Pope Innocent X. [1] [3] [5] [6]

Allegedly, the columns came from the demolished triumphal arch of *Marcus Aurelius* in the *Corso*. If so, they were re-cut to remove the erosion. The design of the pediment was by **Francesco Moderati**, while the two stucco angels are by **Antonio della Bitta** (1856). They were put in their present places in the 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration. [1] [3] [6]

The sculptural altarpiece, showing *The Holy Family return from Egypt with St John the Baptist and his Parents, St. Elizabeth and Zechariah*, is by **Domenico Guidi**, was commissioned by Cardinal Alderano Cibo and completed in 1688 and was re-inserted into the new altar. St John is the boy kneeling in front of the Christ Child, and his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth are to the right. [1] [3] [5]

The tabernacle on the high altar is from 1123. [1]

### Chapel of St Agnes (9)

This occupies the right hand arm of the Greek cross, and is embellished with yellow alabaster, breccia, gilded stucco and polychrome marbles including verde antico and pietrasanta. The altar itself is made from a sarcophagus in red cottanello marble showing the Pamphilj dove, and is by Rainaldi. Above it is a statue of *St Agnes Among the Flames* by **Giovanni Francesco de Rossi**; the depiction is based on the Damasus epitaph, and symbolically the flames are a representation of the fire of sexual temptation (St Agnes is a special patron of chastity). A small concealed lantern throws natural light onto the statue. [1] [5]

The altar is framed by a false perspective giving the impression of a barrel vault. This is achieved by having three pairs pilasters in verde antico of increasing height supporting three nested archivolts in coralline breccia separated by the apparent vaulting in pale pink serravezza. The composition is framed by a pair of gigantic pilasters in alabaster. [1]

Above the trompe l'oeil vault are a pair of angels carrying the symbols of martyrdom (palm branch and crown), and these were also executed by **Ercole Ferrata**. Above these he executed three putti holding a text saying *In medio ignis non sum aestuata* ("In the middle of the fire I am not burned"). [1] [5]

Above the chapel apse there are three musician angels in stucco by **Paolo Landini**. He participated in the interior works from 1662 to 1664. [1] [5] [7]

The side walls display four tondi containing alabaster cameos of famous Church personages who had devotions to the saint. To the right are *SS Thomas Aquinas* (top) and *Jerome* (bottom), and to the left are *St Ambrose* (top) and *Pope Honorius I* (bottom). [e]

The stairs down to the crypt are in the right side of the chapel of St Agnes. The left hand side of the chapel of St Agnes has a door which leads through two rooms to the main sacristy designed by Borromini. [1]

### Crypt of St Agnes (14)

The crypt is formed of three chambers made from ancient Roman remains of the stadium, one of these being the traditional brothel where St Agnes was abused. Throughout the church's history this area has been subject to damp and flooding, and this is still a problem. The Pamphilj did not help themselves in this, because before 1866 they regularly arranged the flooding of Piazza Navona so that the citizens could enjoy boating on the resulting lake. The water then had to be bailed out of the crypt. [1]

At the foot of the stairs you will see a 17<sup>th</sup> century fresco of *St Agnes Supported by an Angel*, and below this is an epigraph of the acta of her martyrdom. Further on, the altar has a marble relief by **Giovanni Buratti** showing *St Agnes Being Led to her Martyrdom*. This is a disturbing piece of work, because it depicts an eleven-year-old girl being taken out of the brothel by ancient Roman soldiers

and the execution of the sculpture is very realistic. [1]

There is also a sculpture of the *Miracle of the Hair of Sant'Agnese* at the altar of the crypt designed by **Alessandro Algardi**, and executed in 1663 by **Giovanni Buratti**. [3] [6]

The seriously damaged fresco work on the walls here was by **Eugenio Cisterna**, executed in 1893 after major restoration by **Vici** in 1885. The style is Catacomb Christian, and the themes are the Apocalypse of St John and the martyrdom of St Agnes. The marble flooring and two panels in opus sectile were restored by **Vici**. [1] [3]

The last room is the ancient oratory which gave rise to the church. It has two columns with Ionic capitals supporting the ceiling vault, and some remnants of Cosmatesque decoration in the floor. [1]

### Chapel of St Sebastian (5)

This is in the Greek cross arm to the left, opposite the chapel of St Agnes. The decorative design of the two chapels is identical, except there are no cameos here. Among the distinctive features are the framing pilasters supporting a complex trabeation, and the porphyry altar shaped like a sarcophagus. The statue of the saint over the altar is in a neo-Classical style, by **Pietro Paolo Campi** who finished it in 1719. [1] [3] [7]

To the left of the chapel of St Sebastian is the chapel of St Francesca Romana, and to the right of the same is the chapel of St Philip Neri. [1]

### Chapel of St Philip Neri (12) (or Chapel of the Cranium of Saint Agnes)

A door to the right of the Chapel of St Sebastian leads into a room, which leads in turn via a right turn to the chapel of St Philip Neri which is just to the left of the main apse in the plan. The anteroom also give access to the Pamphilj burial crypt, completed in 1864. [1]

The ceiling fresco of *The Apotheosis of St Philip Neri* is by **Francesco Allegrini**. This, together with the rest of the decorative scheme, was restored in 1859 by **Annibale Angelini** under the supervision of **Vici**. [1] [3] [7]

This used to be the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, but in 1908 Pope Pius X decreed that the skull of St Agnes should be enshrined on the altar here. It used to be part of the collection of relics at San Lorenzo in Palatio ad Sancta Sanctorum, and ownership of the relic remains with the Papacy. This is a popular spot in the church for private prayer and veneration, since the tourists tend not to get this far. [1]

### Necropolis or Cemetery Crypt (13)

The entrance to the Cemetery Crypt of St. Agnes is located in the corridor leading to the Chapel of St. Philip Neri. This area was restored in 1864, again by **Andrea Busiri Vici**. [7]

Going down a steep flight of steps you will find yourself in the long underground corridor that, passing under the Presbytery, reaches the corridor in front of the Sacristy of Borromini, thus crossing the whole Church. [7]

Along the walls there are the burial niches where the ancestors of the Doria-Pamphilj family are buried, until the edict of Napoleon, who ordered the burial outside the city walls. In the middle of the corridor there is a niche where there is an altar surmounted by a bas-relief. [7]

In the corridor in front of the altar is buried Pope Innocent X. [7]

Pope Innocent X, who died on January 7, 1655, buried in St. Peter's, in 1677 the body was moved and buried in St. Agnes, in the Chapel of St. Francesca Romana, where it remained, it seems forgotten, until 1838, the year in which it was moved to the Crypt, where it is currently located. [7]

From the Altar there is also a corridor that ends in the middle of the Church above, right in correspondence with the rose window in the center of the floor. [7]



Among the various corpses buried in the Crypt (July 1829) there is also that of Teresa Orsini in Doria-Pamphilj, whose Beatification Process is in progress, and whose Reconnaissance will soon take place. [7]

#### Chapel of St Francesca Romana (15)

St Francesca Romana, founder of the Congregation of Oblates of Mary in Rome, is one of the city's patron saints. Her family lived in the neighborhood immediately behind Sant'Agnese in Agone, and as an infant she was baptized in the old church. When that was demolished, the redundant font was kept as a sacred relic and enshrined under the chapel altar. The pair of angels flanking it are by **Andrea Bolgi**. The altarpiece is a marble relief of *St Francesca Romana accompanied by her Guardian Angel*. The sculpted panel is believed to be the work of **Domenico Guidi**. It is set into an aedicule of purplish-red marble. [1] [7]

Below the altar table is the stone baptismal font used for her christening, salvaged from the ancient church of Saint Agnes. [7]

The ceiling fresco shows *The Apotheosis of St Francesca Romana*, and is by **Francesco Cozza**. The saint is shown being taken into heaven while accompanied by angels playing musical instruments. [1] [3]

#### Altar dedicated to St Cecilia (6)

This is the top left one of the four little chapels inserted into the piers supporting the dome. It is dedicated to St Cecilia, who has her basilica at Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. [1]

The altarpiece is a bas-relief sculpture showing the *Death of St. Cecilia while being visited by Pope Urban I, Hippolytus and Valerian, her husband*, and is by **Antonio Raggi**. The stucco ceiling decoration decorations were made by **Ercole Ferrata**, designed by **Ciro Ferri**. The panel over the chapel shows her attribute of an organ, since she is patron of musicians. [1] [3] [7]

#### Altar dedicated to St Emerentiana (8)

This is the top right hand one. It is dedicated to St. Emerentiana, an obscure early Roman female martyr who had her own catacombs (now inaccessible) further up the Via Nomentana than those of St Agnes. [1]

She was co-opted into the developed legend of St Agnes, which describes her as the latter's milk-sister (that is, the daughter of Agnes's wet-nurse). After Agnes was buried, she was spotted by some pagans while praying at the tomb who tried to make her run away by throwing rocks at her. She refused to move, and was killed as a result. This event is depicted in the altarpiece, which was designed by **Algardi** and begun by **Ferrata**. Unfortunately, he died before he got very far and the work was completed by **Leonardo Retti**. [1] [3] [b]

The stucco gallery above the altar is attributed to **Ferrata**. It represents angels in flight holding a scroll with the words 'Veni Sponsa Christi', the words sung during the Mass for virgins and martyrs. [c]

#### Altar dedicated to St Alexis (10)

This is the bottom right hand one, and is dedicated to St Alexis who has his basilica at Sant'Alessio all'Aventino. According to legend, Alexis was the son of Euphemianus, a Roman patrician and senator, and of his wife Aglae. On the eve of his wedding Alexis left his parents' home to set off on a pilgrimage. He lived for 18 years in Edessa where he begged for his living on the steps of a church where rumors grew of his sanctity. He then returned to Rome and lived as a destitute beggar under an outside staircase which is preserved at his basilica as a relic. He was only recognized by his parents when actually dying, and the altarpiece here depicts the moment. It shows Pope Innocent I showing the parents the document which the saint had carried, and which proved his identity. The work is by **Giovanni Francesco de Rossi** (1660-1663). [1] [3] [e]

The stucco ceiling is the work of **Ercole Ferrata**, and shows angels and cherubs with the symbols of Saint Alexis: a pilgrim's staff, floral wreath and lily. [7] [e]

#### Chapel of St Eustace (4)

This is the bottom left hand one, and is dedicated to St Eustace who is the patron saint of hunters. The altarpiece shows the saint having been thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre, with the allegedly miraculous result that they behaved like pussy cats, completed in 1667. The work was begun by **Melchiorre Cafà**, but he died soon after beginning it and it was completed by **Ferrata** assisted by **Giovanni Francesco de Rossi**. The basin with emblems of the holy angels was designed by **Ciro Ferri** and executed by **Ercole Ferrata**. [1] [3] [e]

#### Monument of Pope Innocent X (2)

Above the main entrance you can see the funerary monument of Pope Innocent X which dates from 1730, and is designed by **Gabriele Valvassori** and built by the stonemason **Giacomo Ferrari**. This oddly unsatisfactory work shows the pope standing behind his sarcophagus as if it were a balcony, flanked by two pairs of caryatids. The female figures sitting on the sarcophagus are *Justice*, to the right, and *Religion* by **Giovanni Battista Maini**. The body of the pope rests in the crypt to the left of the high altar. [1] [3] [d]

Upon the death of Pope Innocent X, Olimpia Maidalchini, the pope's sister-in-law, took all the belongings of the pontiff, refusing to give even vestments for his burial. His body was left in room for a day, until Majordome Scotti had a simple casket constructed for him. Canon Segni gave five scudi for his burial expenses. Originally buried in St. Peter's Basilica, later his remains were transferred to the tomb built by his nephew Camillo Pamphilj and his grand nephew Giovanni Battista Pamphilj. [5]

The organ loft was built in 1659-62 and decorated with putti by **Domenico Poli** and **Isidoro Baratta**. The present organ was built by **Eberhard Walcker**, 1913. The organ loft was remade to a design by **Luigi Maria Valadier**, 1842. Below the corsetti are eight reliefs carved by **Ercole Ferrata** and **Domenico Guidi** of angels holding symbols of saints, 1657-58. [d]

#### Borromini sacristy (11)

A door in the left hand side of the Chapel of St Agnes leads into a room. Straight ahead is an exit into the Via di Santa Maria dell'Anima, while on the right hand side is a monumental entrance into the narthex of the so-called "summer sacristy" (as distinct from the actual sacristy (16) next to the chapel of St Francesca Romana, which is nicknamed the "winter sacristy"). [1]

This sacristy was built between 1658 and 1666 to a design by **Francesco Borromini**, and completed by **Andrea Baratta**. This edifice amounts to a small church in its own right, and since it is fully designed by Borromini it is very important and counts with his other small churches in the city such as San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane or Santa Maria dei Sette Dolori. It is dedicated to Our Lady, and contains the church's Marian altar. [1] [7]

The entrance is flanked by two angels in marble, carrying holy water stoups, and these are by **Andrea Baratta**. It leads into the narthex, a transverse rectangular barrel-vaulted room with a lavatorium in a niche again by **Baratta**. The sacristy itself is entered through an archway, which has its echo in the triumphal arch into the apse containing the high altar at the other end. [1] [3]

The space is laid out as a collegiate chapel, with wooded choir stalls along the side walls. This indicates that perhaps the original intention when building the church was to have a convent or college of priests attached to serve it, something that did not happen. The layout is octagonal, the octagon being formed by chamfering a rectangle, and there is a spectacular ceiling vault in gold with white stucco embellishments which springs from Ionic pilasters (not Corinthian, as everywhere else in the church). [1]

The ceiling vault has a fresco of the *Assumption* by **Paolo Gismondi** (1666), and the side walls of the apse have the *Birth of the Virgin* and the *Annunciation*, painted by **Francesco Allegrini** in 1660. The icon on the high altar is also by him. [1] [3]

#### **Burials:**

Pope [Innocent X](#) {Giambattista [PAMPHILJ](#), (1574-1655)}

Benedetto Cardinal [PAMPHILJ](#), O.S.Io.Hieros., (1653-1730)

Antonio Maria Cardinal [DORIA PAMPHILJ](#), (1749-1821)

Giorgio Cardinal [DORIA PAMPHILJ](#), (1772-1837)

## Artists and Architects:

Alessandro [Algardi](#) (1598-1654), Italian high- Baroque sculptor, architect  
Andrea [Baratta](#) (1657-1700), Italian sculptor  
Andrea [Bolgi](#) [aka *Carrarino*] (1606-1656), Italian sculptor from Carrara  
Andrea [Busiri Vici](#) (1817-1911), Italian architect  
Annibale [Angelini](#) (1812-1884), Italian painter  
Antonio della Bitta (1807-1882), Italian sculptor  
Antonio [Raggi](#) [aka *Il Lombardo*] (1624-1686), Italian sculptor of the Baroque  
Carlo [Rainaldi](#) (1611-1691), Italian architect of the Baroque period  
Ciro [Ferri](#) (1634-1689), Italian Baroque painter and sculptor  
Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
Domenico Poli (17<sup>th</sup> cent.), Italian stucco sculptor  
Ercole [Ferrata](#) (1610-1686), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period  
Eugenio [Cisterna](#) (1862-1933), Italian painter & mosaic designer  
Francesco [Allegri](#) da Gubbio (1587-1663), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
Francesco [Borromini](#) (1599-1667), leading figure in the emergence of Roman Baroque architecture  
Francesco [Cozza](#) (1605-1682), Italian painter of the Baroque period  
Francesco Moderati (1680-1721), Italian sculptor  
Gabriele [Valvassori](#) (1683-1761), Italian architect of the late-Baroque period  
Giacomo Antonio Ferrari (18<sup>th</sup> century), Italian stonemason  
Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680), Italian Baroque sculptor and architect [also see [here](#)]  
Giovanni Battista Celsi (19<sup>th</sup> cent.), Iron sculptor  
Giovanni Battista [Gauli](#) [aka *Baciccia*] (1639-1709), Italian painter of the High Baroque  
Giovanni Battista [Maini](#) (1690-1752), Italian sculptor of the Late-Baroque period  
Giovanni Buratti (17<sup>th</sup> cent.), Italian sculptor  
Giovanni Francesco [de Rossi](#) [aka *La Vecchietta*] (active 1640-1677), Italian sculptor  
Giovanni Maria [Baratta](#) (1617-1680), Italian architect from Carrara  
Girolamo [Rainaldi](#) (1570-1655), Italian Mannerist architect  
Giuseppe Baratta (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian stone mason  
Isidoro Baratta (17<sup>th</sup> cent.), Italian stucco sculptor  
Leonardo [Retti](#) (1670-1709), Italian sculptor  
Luigi Maria Valadier (1791-c.1841), Italian architect and sculptor  
Melchiorre [Cafà](#) (1636-1667), Baroque sculptor from Malta  
Paolo [Gismondi](#) [aka *Paolo Perugino*] (1612-1685), Italian painter  
Paolo Landini (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian sculptor  
Pietro Paolo [Campi](#) (1678-1764), Italian neo-Classical sculptor  
Sebastiano Corbellini (17<sup>th</sup> cent), Italian Baroque painter  
[Walcker](#) Organ Company

## Location:

Addr: Via di Santa Maria dell'Anima 30, (Piazza Navona) 00186 Roma

Coord: [41° 53' 55.5"N, 12° 28' 21.3"E](#)

## Info:

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Website: [www.santagneseinagone.org](http://www.santagneseinagone.org)

## Access

The church is open 9:00 to 13:00, 15:00 to 19:00 (20:00 on weekends). Closed Mondays.

## Liturgy

Masses during the week are not advertised.

Sunday Masses are at 19:00 (Saturday evening), 11:00, 12:15 and 19:00.

## Links and References:

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2. [English Wikipedia page](#)
3. [Info Rome web site](#)
4. [Church's website](#)
5. [Cardinals of the Catholic Church](#)
6. [Romapedia blog](#)
7. [Church web site](#)
8. [Pamphilj family page in Wikipedia](#)
9. [Mi Moleskine Arquitectónico blog](#) (in Spanish)
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## Other links:

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

["Moleskine Arquitectonico" blog](#)

["Romeartlover" web-page](#)

[Tourist info site](#) (060608.it)

[YouTube video](#)

["De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr](#)

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